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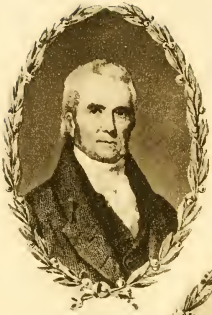

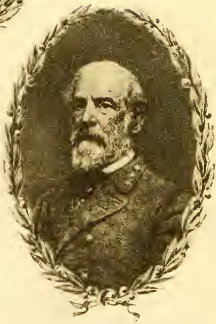

VIRGINIA

BY

EDWIN ANDERSON ALDERMAN

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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AN ADDRESS DELIVERED IN RESPONSE TO THE TOAST "VIRGINIA," AT THE BANQUET GIVEN BY THE CITIZENS OF PETERSBURG, VIRGINIA, TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES AND THE GOVERNOR OF PENNSYLVANIA, ON MAY 19, 1909.

VIRGINIA

WHENEVER men join in tribute to other men who were willing to sacrifice themselves for a conception of public duty, the whole human mass moves forward in the way of brotherhood. One may, with entire restraint, call this day, which we have spent in this historic city, a day of dignity and high feeling. Even if the Chief-Magistrate of the Republic had not honored it by his kindly presence, its own memories, sincerities, and fraternities would suffice to set it apart for remembrance and respect. Pennsylvania and Virginia are tied together by many unbreakable bonds of common ancestry, common glory, and common tragedy. Staunton and Pittsburg were once in the same county in the far-off

days when Virginia was so inclusive a term as to cover most of the country. Valley Forge and Germantown loom back of Gettysburg. Back of civil strife may be seen the brotherly forms of Washington and Franklin, and Independence Hall in Philadelphia and Thomas Jefferson of Virginia are forever united in the thought of the world. Among the men who charged with such wild valor at Gettysburg, and the men who stood with such granite firmness, were the same German and Scotch-Irish breeds who had peopled the Appalachians and had made the Shenandoah Valley the cradle of American democracy. Save perhaps at Dunbar and Naseby field, so large a proportion of brothers in blood of our race had never before met in shock of battle. It is fortunate for a

republic like ours that great States like Pennsylvania and Virginia can turn from contemplation of their differences to warm their souls at the fire of common glories, for in that warmth such gross dross as hate and unforgiveness are consumed and pass away.

The State of North Carolina was my birthplace. I am profoundly grateful for the privilege of birth among that brave, self-reliant, and progressive people whose virtues are such as to guarantee to my mind that a democracy such as theirs will be the final form of government. My birth State taught me faith in men and confidence in the ultimate rectitude of public impulse, and I have for that State and that people the enduring love which a son should bear to a proud and generous mother.

Virginia is now my home, and I have learned to love her and her people as all must who taste the quality of Virginia life. What strength I have is spent in the service of Virginia, and I rejoice in the opportunity of rendering, in this inspiring presence, that discriminating praise of her which all Americans owe, and which both love and reverence for her impel me to utter.

We of the South are sometimes laughed at gently for our sensitiveness to local things and our pride of State. Let us not be laughed out of this sentiment. I am an American, and feel utterly at home in this republic of my fathers, to which I owe and give as supreme affection and allegiance as if these bullets had never sped across the fields of civil strife. There is a weak and evil sec-

tionalism which distrusts all who do not live in its particular region. This sinister sectionalism reaches a climax of folly and hurtfulness when it exalts complaisancy and self-satisfaction above open-mindedness and constant analysis. There is, as well, a fruitful and noble sectionalism which simply exalts love of home, and interest and affection for one's neighbors. Out of this fruitful sectionalism have come the great unselfishnesses, the great heroisms, the great sacrifices, the great men of the world. Indeed, the story of America is merely the story of great sections developing individual characteristics under the pressure of social and economic conditions, and then, by the sheer strength of local pride, reacting upon other sections and thus shaping into unity that complex result which

we call national character. The great literatures of the race have been the work of those who loved their home lands, and saw so deeply into the meaning of life just about them, that they uttered their experiences in forms of such simple beauty and truth as to touch the universal heart, and so attained cosmopolitanism—and, sometimes, immortality. Burns upturned the modest violet in rude Scottish earth, but its fate and its fragrance have filled the world. One cannot imagine Homer and the great Greeks travelling abroad for inspiration. It is not strange to our quieter thought that England was the crystal drop in which Shakespeare mirrored the world's experience, and Christ needed only the sights and sounds of Judean by-ways to furnish him with

the material for the pictures which, hanging forever in our minds, excel all others in wisdom and beauty. I speak in no narrow parochial spirit, therefore, when I say that Virginia seems to me the most distinguished, the most engaging, the most unselfish, and, in a spiritual sense, the most vital of American Commonwealths.

Perhaps the supreme distinction of all life is motherhood. No one can deny to Virginia the authority that springs from the motherhood of this Republic. Our civilization began on her watercourses, and our democracy was cradled in her mountain valleys. The story of John Smith and the arrival of the slave ship stamp her dimmest beginnings with a stamp of romance and tragedy. The Mayflower is an epic ship sailing west-

ward on an unknown sea, bringing to these shores a breed of men who bore with them the town meeting, the public school, an appreciation of the value of the common man, and an indomitable capacity. Institutions and ideas were in their right hand, and in their left hand a wilfulness, a foresight, and a common sense as inflexible as granite. They, too, builded a mighty Commonwealth which became the mother of States. No less epic are the ships that bore to Tidewater Virginia men whose souls were wrought in the same revolutionary fire in the old home land. It is very silly to think of Virginia as springing from the loins of the butterflies of British aristocracy. These men, too, knew what it meant to die for a cause, and their conception of political liberty

was just as clear and their genius for political expression perhaps a little clearer than that of the voyagers on the Mayflower. In following their differing paths of development these two prolific sections have greatly misunderstood each other. But in all their generations of dissension I see a certain quality of curiosity and interest, of sympathy and regret, akin to that which shows in a divided family, or which shines for us so strikingly in that gentlest and most singular of all historic reconciliations, when John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, after a lifetime of misunderstanding, had power given to their dying eyes to behold each other, face to face, in lineaments of essential grandeur and dignity.

Certainly, there are no two peoples

in the world who quietly enjoy so much each other's commendation, or wince so smartly under each other's disapproval. When a New Englander has the greatness of soul to perceive the royal beauty of the character of Lee, or when a man like Lamar beholds and utters sublime words of understanding of the soul of a man like Sumner, it is a fine thing to note the glow of good feeling that pervades the two regions.

Out of Virginia's life came our supreme national hero and a group of resourceful men without whose influence it is difficult to see how the nation could ever have been born. They were able to achieve, besides, a manly personal charm, a grand manner, a catholic lovableness, the simplicity that belongs to a shepherd with the pride that be-

longs to a king, that established them forever in the affections of men. How cheapened of distinction and impoverished of dignity would be our national life if it were bereft of the glorified common sense of George Washington, the human sympathy and cosmopolitanism of Thomas Jefferson, the penetrating analysis of John Marshall, the patient wisdom of James Madison, and the instinct for duty and the calm forbearance and lofty wisdom of Robert E. Lee, who long generations afterwards flowered into the rose of his stately and tolerant manhood, very like the old stock, only gentler and more able, through virtue and suffering, to evoke the love of millions! Two such men as Washington and Lee in one century give to Tidewater Virginia the same sort of distinc-

tion which Pericles and Leonidas give to the Grecian Archipelago, for, after all, it is the output of great men that makes fame and friends for nations. Mr. Choate once told the English that the chiefest industry of America was education: so I may say that the chiefest contribution of Virginia to American life has been men, great governmental ideas, and a great spirit. If a stranger to American institutions should inquire who founded this republic, who shaped its structures for the ages, and who breathed into it the spirit that has enabled it to become the most venerable and impressive of all republics, a truthful answer, whoever it might exclude, would certainly include the names of Patrick Henry, George Washington, Richard Henry Lee, Thomas Jefferson,

James Madison, John Marshall, James Monroe, George Mason, and many more less known to world-fame but a part of the amazing outburst of intellectual energy that came out of this Commonwealth to set the framework of our great popular experiment in forms of imperishable strength and beauty.

From Virginia's life, too, arose the genius that clothed in noble phrase the reasons for revolution; that guided victoriously the legions of war; that bore foremost initiative in shaping the Constitution; that interpreted its spirit; that widened colonial vision from provincialism to empire; and that fixed faith in average humanity as the philosophy of a new civilization. But it is as a land of the spirit that Virginia seems most majestic to me and most

moving to any generous soul. Mere lists of measures traceable to her soil, or mere lists of great men who adorn her annals, do not convey adequately her message to this upward-striving democracy. That message is best conveyed by her spirit and that spirit is best summed up in three words—unselfishness, devotion to duty, and love of home. Can any message be more needed by our over-nourished, over-specialized, nervous society, suffering, it seems to me, from the very excesses of energy and achievement?

When, in the interests of stability and union, it seemed necessary to surrender an imperial domain to the young government for which she had sacrificed so much, Virginia made that surrender without reservation, without haggling

or bargaining, and with a graciousness and dignity that add a certain splendor to that critical, suspicious, and unlovely period in our progress toward nationality. The States of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois were carved out of that gift. One of them, at least, Ohio, has reached the point of contesting with her ancient mother the authority of being the mother of Presidents. Virginia can bear her success in this high emulation with fortitude, for she feels that Ohio's sons, including our distinguished guest to-day, the honored and beloved President of a reunited country, are the results of Virginia's generosity and partake of Virginia's spirit. Not content with this large gift of empire, like a thoughtful mother, Virginia assumed the task of providing

for the guidance of the future populations of her surrendered domain, the genius of her great philosopher and friend of men, Jefferson, guiding her pen, and in the Ordinance of 1787 practically created a new "magna charta" which gave to that community the benefits of enlightened freedom in a larger way than had ever before been accorded to pioneers in new lands. I confess that there is no more painful circumstance to me in our history than the fact that this gracious and generous Commonwealth was one day to have what was left of its modest territory sundered and violated as a penalty for its devotion to an ideal of public duty.

It was reserved, however, for the Civil War and its consequences to test to the uttermost the spirit of Virginia and to

prove that spirit pure gold. Do not fancy that I have the purpose to analyze the causes of this war, or to kindle from their ashes the fires that once burned so fiercely here and elsewhere through the land. The war between the States was a brothers' war, brought on, as our human nature is constituted, by the operation of economic forces, the clashing of inherited feelings, the impact of differing notions about the meaning of liberty woven by no will of either section into the very fabric of the people's life. Thus fate-driven, the sections came to war embodying in stern antagonism two majestic ideas—the idea of local self-government and the idea of union. No war in human history was a sincerer conflict than this war. It was not a war for conquest or glory. To

call it rebellion is to speak ignorantly; to call it treason is to add viciousness to stupidity. It was a war of ideas, principles, political conceptions, and of loyalty to ancient ideals of English freedom.

Virginia did not enter this war with a light heart. She loved the Union, for it was her child. Calmly, patiently, sadly, without haste or passion, save a certain anguish of spirit, Virginia made her choice while all the world awaited breathlessly which way would fall her decision and which way her great authority. True to character, Virginia went the old path of sympathy, idealism, and unselfishness, and a certain grand accounting of honor more than life and loyalty more than gold. With everything to lose and nothing to gain ma-

terially by her decision, she yet made it proudly, because to her mind the oldest and noblest conception of freedom was local self-government, and to her heart, as one might expect from a mother of States, came the appeal of her children on the Gulf plains and the Atlantic Seaboard—lands populated by her sons, and looking to her for guidance and leadership in the troubled seas sweeping about them. They were younger Virginias crying to the mother for help in an hour of doubt and peril. These younger Virginias in the hot blood of youth and pride of growth had gone beyond the old mother in a tragic and supreme adventure. Now they were needing her ancient supremacy and her maternal counsel. No such compelling tide of sympathy and love

and responsibility joined with a clear perception of constitutional justice ever before swept a great State to a supreme decision. Virginia, therefore, the builder of States and lover of peace, became the battlefield of a mighty struggle, and entered upon the course that caused her to experience a discipline of war and its consequences unknown to any other American community. Beleaguered cities, devastated valleys, ruined fields, precious life wasted, and all the land red like blood—this was the allotment of fate to Virginia. It is no coincidence that Yorktown and Appomattox, our mightiest American happenings, fell in Virginia. They fell there because Virginia was the root of the matter in both of the great crises.

To the material vision Virginia seemed

ruined indeed when the storm had passed, but now we know that it was not so. She had suffered more than any country save Poland, and Poland ceased to exist. There was poverty in Virginia and throughout the South, but it begot strength; there was wounded pride, but it begot in big hearts a noble humility; there was lack of energy in law and order in society, but it begot self-reliance and constructiveness: and somehow the love of millions lightened the gloom of the war-smitten land. By the might of great sacrifice, and great achievement, and great fortitude, Virginia achieved a spiritual authority over the hearts of Americans that she could not have won by the most astonishing material success. The golden peace in which the old State had been lapped for

a generation had given no successors to the great dynasty of the past. The age of war and economic ruin, through the immortal careers of Lee, Jackson, Johnston, Stuart, and a goodly host of others, established a new dynasty of virtue and genius. The State became the State of memories to the old who had traversed its fields and red hills in the pride of youth and in the pomp of war, and it became a land of spiritual values to the young in the North and in the South who invested it with youth's generous ardor, with the consecration that belongs to regions where great deeds have been done and great martyrdoms endured.

Sympathetic and curious friends from other lands and States sometimes wonder why Virginia and the South give to

General Lee a sort of intensity of love that they do not give even to Washington. The reason is simple to those who know Virginia and Lee. Washington stands high, clean, spotless, like the shaft that commemorates his fame in the national capital, at the gateway of our republican history symbolizing the majesty of the era of origins and success. In a noble rhapsody about Napoleon, Heinrich Heine declared that in his brain the eagles of inspiration built their eyries and in his heart hissed the serpents of ambition. Neither an eagle nor a serpent can ever figure in any description of the life and deeds of George Washington. He is simply a great illuminating allegory of unselfishness, self-control, and character, preaching in his life and in his grave utterances

the high doctrine that immeasurable fame and service may be rendered more enduringly by integrity and honor than by eloquence or superhuman gifts. Lee is a type and an embodiment of the best there is in all the sincere and romantic history of the whole State. Its triumphs, its defeats, its joys, its sufferings, its rebirths, its pride, its patience center in him. In that regnant figure of quiet strength and invincible rectitude and utter self-surrender may be discerned the complete drama of a great stock. As he stood at Arlington on that fateful day in 1861, smiting his hands in agony over a decision he needs must make, his agony was his people's agony: as he rode in triumph, by virtue of genius and valor, through the storm of victorious battle, his glory

was their glory: as he stood forth amid all vicissitudes, ever unshaken of disaster or unspoiled by success, his fortitude was their fortitude: as the result of the Great Appeal was seen to rest at last upon his broad shoulders and his stout heart, his constancy was their constancy: as he stood at the end amid the shadows of defeat, an appealing and unconquerable figure of virtue, of service, and of dignity, his dignity was their dignity: and somehow in the majesty of his manner and bearing, he reached back into the very roots of the proud past of the Old Dominion and connected its golden age and its ancient authorities, its long and happy peace with the trouble and wonder of the present. And now, in this hour of reunion and reconciliation, we know

how, in those five quiet, laborious years at Lexington, he symbolized the future for us as it has come to pass, and bade us live in it, in liberal and lofty fashion, with hearts unspoiled by hate and eyes clear to see the needs of a new and a mightier day. Can you wonder at the measure of the love a people bear for such an embodiment of their best? Surely God was good and full of thought for a people to set in the forefront of their life a figure so large and ample and faultless!

Gone from Virginia forever, let us hope, are the days of suffering and privation. Progress and peace rule her counsels and prosperity smiles upon her fields. Wealth is pouring into her coffers. Hope and capacity and genius for adjustment glow in the hearts and

minds of her sons. Faith in all her people, whether they issue out of the old stock chastened by fortitude and woe, or out of the plain people who fought her battles for her, is now her chiefest passion and their education her chiefest concern. Secure in the dignity of a spiritual authority which she has earned, Virginia holds up her head among her sisters even more proudly than in the older time when she gave rulers and law to the young republic, for her pride is more completely that just pride which springs out of intelligent devotion to all classes of her people.

Enriched by the spirit of a gentle civilization flowing about her for generations, protected by the love and veneration of thousands, and busy with

a multitude of schemes for her own social betterment, she will yet not be turned aside from the glory and privilege of sharing in the inevitable remaking of the legal framework and the social spirit of the unrended country to which she gave birth and which she nourished in its helpless youth. There is a simple and holy feeling in her heart that the whole nation needs, in a peculiar sense, the strength and virtue which she has to contribute to its life, and that, in some grave hour of national peril yet to come, as such hours must come to every democracy, when the age of moral warfare shall succeed to the age of passionate gain-getting; when blind social forces have wrought some tangle of inequality and injustice; when the whole people shall seek for the

man of heart and faith—out of her uncorrupted, abounding life shall issue leadership and guidance for the great republic cradled on her soil, and now grown so great.